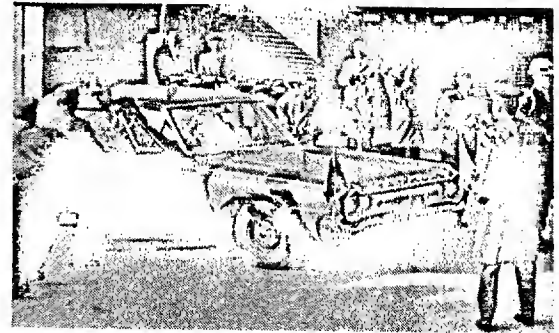


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U. S. News & World Report

INTERVIEW WITH Lee Su-kun, Korean Newsman



1. On floor of this U. N. car, Mr. Lee races for freedom after armistice meeting at Panmunjom.

"WHY I FLED FROM COMMUNIST NORTH KOREA"

What are the Reds up to in North Korea? A rare close-up of that country emerges in this exclusive interview with Lee Su-kun, a North Korean newspaperman who recently made a dramatic escape. He was interviewed by K. M. Chrysler of the staff of "U. S. News & World Report."

AT SEOUL

Q Mr. Lee, what is life really like in North Korea?

A I have traveled throughout Eastern Europe, and I feel there is less freedom in North Korea than in any other country in the Communist bloc. It is just like Russia when it was controlled by Stalin.

As far as North Korean leaders are concerned, the Eastern European countries are no longer following Marxist doctrine. They are too enlightened, too liberal in their thinking and living. If the people of East Europe want to go into a church or see a Western movie or dance, they can. Not so in North Korea, where leaders are afraid of granting freedom of any kind.

There is no such thing as personal freedom or liberty. Everything is strictly controlled. For example, jobs are all allocated by the Government. You cannot change jobs without official approval. It is not even wise to marry without the permission of the Communist Party. You can do so if you dare, but you are penalized and condemned as a "freedom lover."

Another example: In theory, you can travel freely within North Korea, but in actual fact you cannot. Why not? Unless your trip is officially sanctioned, you are not given any rations during your travels, and your pay is stopped. Besides, you probably couldn't afford the fare, anyway. For instance, the one-day, 200-mile trip from Pyongyang to Chongjin on the East Coast costs 50 or 60 won [\$19.46 or \$23.35]—a whole month's wage for most people.

Q What is the mood of people up there?

A Superficially, the North Koreans in their daily life appear to be supporting the regime and the party. But underneath they are unhappy. They are not satisfied and are displeased. The 1.3 million party members presumably like

things the way they are. But most of the remainder of North Korea's 14 million people have little cause to applaud.

For example, the relatives of the 5 million refugees who fled from North to South after World War II do not like the artificial division of Korea created by the Communists. Now that all business is run by the Government, there is no place for private businessmen. Intellectuals and the well-educated are stifled, as are other people in a position to know how things are elsewhere in the world, such as newspapermen.

Probably the most disillusioned North Koreans of all are those who voluntarily repatriated themselves from Japan, expecting beauty and freedom. They found something quite different.

Q Why aren't there more defections?

A Defecting is easier said than done, because of two large obstacles: Escape is particularly difficult from a society which builds a high, strong wall between its citizens and the rest of the world. And those few in a position to get away are seldom able to free their families too, so they rarely attempt escape.

Q How is the standard of living in North Korea?

A Except for the minority of top officials who live reasonably well, the people are not very well off. Most people do not get enough to eat most of the time. Food is cheap, but scarce. There is a chronic shortage of rice, our staple food, and all food is strictly rationed.

A productive worker is allowed only 700 grams [about 1½ pounds] a day. This might be acceptable to someone who sits at a desk, but it is insufficient for a man doing hard manual work, and half the population lives on farms. Nonproductive workers such as housewives and children are limited to 400 grams [not quite one pound] per day. And 30 to 50 per cent of everybody's daily ration is not rice but beans, corn or some other grain.

Clothing is not rationed, but the gap between wages and prices efficiently cuts down on purchases. For instance, this suit I am wearing would cost 300 won [\$116.73] in North Korea, almost two months of my wages there. And I was considered well paid. A college graduate starting on a newspaper gets only 45 won [\$17.51] a month. A skilled worker earns around 60 won [\$23.35] monthly, and it is hardly enough to live on.

Q What about housing?

A As far as I know, every country in the Communist bloc has a housing problem. There isn't enough and what there is is of poor quality. North Korea is no exception.

Continued



2. North Korean guards, left, try to get Mr. Lee. U. S. MP blocks them.



3. Guards chase car, by now out of sight. Car crashed through an illegal Red barrier.



4. Guards open fire, to no avail. Mr. Lee's escape took place on March 22.

Q How is the Government economic planning working out?

A Everybody knows that North Korea's Seven-Year Plan has failed. It was supposed to end this year, but they have had to extend it to 1970.

First of all, the ideological conflict in the Communist world resulted in a cutback in aid from Russia.

Secondly, a big military build-up has been made at the expense of normal economic growth. The demands of the military forces and the civilian forces cannot coexist. A shortage of capital has been aggravated by military requirements and, as a result, many factories planned for nonmilitary goods have never been completed.

This leads to a third point: Economic development in North Korea has not been very well co-ordinated. Targets were overambitious. Plans have seldom been thought through, and controls were inadequate. The authorities have created a shell of heavy industry without paying attention to the parts needed to support it. In effect, they installed the backbone but forgot to add ribs, flesh and muscle.

Q You mentioned a military build-up. What's going on?

A It is impossible for a civilian like me to say with any accuracy. Military matters are a carefully guarded state secret. But I can make these comments:

Great efforts have been made to modernize and upgrade weapons and equipment. For example, North Korea has acquired an Air Force which it did not have in 1953. And they have Russian-made surface-to-air missiles. About five years ago I heard that one of these North Korean SAM's knocked down an American U-2 spy plane.

There are about 470,000 in North Korea's military forces, including reserve units. In addition, the entire population has undergone military training. Everyone—men, women, farmers, laborers, white-collar workers, even actors and actresses—is a member of the militia.

Finally, I should explain that the military forces are top-heavy with rank. For example, platoon leaders have been carefully trained so that, when the next war starts, they can immediately take command of a company. The military forces stand ready to expand almost instantly.

Q How much military aid are they getting from outside?

A I don't know the quantities, but airplanes, missiles, submarines and other Navy ships have been acquired—heavy weaponry North Korea cannot produce itself.

I don't think China is in a position to provide much military aid. Russian economic and military aid was resumed last year on a large scale after North Korea declared its independence from China. Even more aid is expected in the future.

Q What's behind this big military build-up?

A North Korea's main goal, politically and economically, is communization of South Korea. In order to do this, they feel they must beef up their military forces in preparation for an invasion when the time is ripe.

Q In recent months, there has been a sharp increase in incidents along the Demilitarized Zone which divides Korea. Do these tie in with North Korean ambitions to take over the South?

A There are various explanations for North Korean harassment along the Demilitarized Zone. Last autumn, for example, there was a shoot-up to protest the visit of President Johnson to Korea. In past weeks, I am convinced my defection is responsible in part for DMZ raids. The raiders are trying to kidnap a South Korean or U. S. officer in retaliation and use him for propaganda purposes.

But a more important reason for the recent harassment was the presidential election in the Republic of Korea on May 3. The Communists were trying to show that there can be no stability in the South as long as Korea is divided. And they also are trying to emphasize that the dispatch of two Republic of Korea divisions to Vietnam has weakened South Korean defenses. They are particularly interested in preventing the dispatch of more Korean troops to Vietnam.

Q Are the Korean Communists supplying much aid to the Communists in Vietnam?

A They are positively and very aggressively supporting North Vietnam to the best of their ability, with such things as small arms and ammunition, tractors, diesel engines, small ships and chemical fertilizer.

About 100 North Korean Air Force pilots have been sent to Vietnam to gain combat experience, but no regular troops are involved. As far as I know, none have been requested by Hanoi.

Q What do the North Koreans think about the split between Russia and Red China?

A North Korean leaders were not surprised by the split and they do not consider reconciliation possible, at least not in the near future.

Moreover, from their point of view, the split has its advantages. One-nation control of the Communist bloc is no longer possible. Each Communist nation is now permitted more independence.

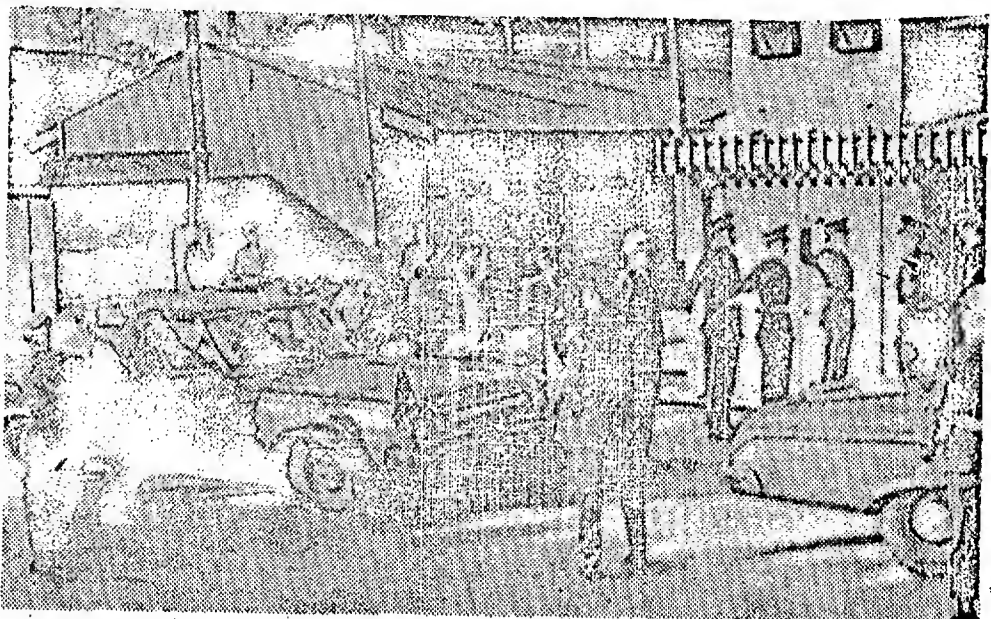
A new policy line announced last August was a direct repudiation of Mao Tse-tung and his "cultural revolution." In reality, it signaled more independence from China and more dependence upon Russia.

But it must be emphasized that Pyongyang leaders feel North Korea is the best example of Communism at work. They term the Chinese "leftist adventurers," and criticize the Russians for being "revisionists."

Q What have the Communists really accomplished?

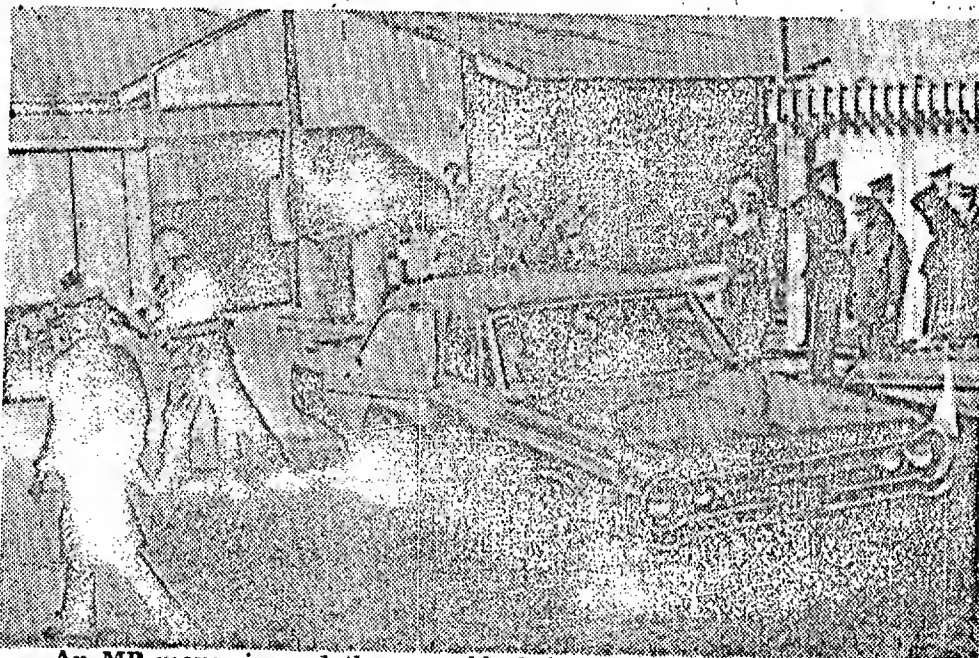
A I imagine Kim Il Sung [North Korea's Prime Minister] is chiefly pleased with his development of heavy industry, creation of a strong military force, and successful brainwashing of North Korea's youth.

But he has failed miserably in the most important thing: He has been unable to improve living standards, or permit even a small ration of personal liberty.



RED DEFECTOR HAS CLOSE CALL

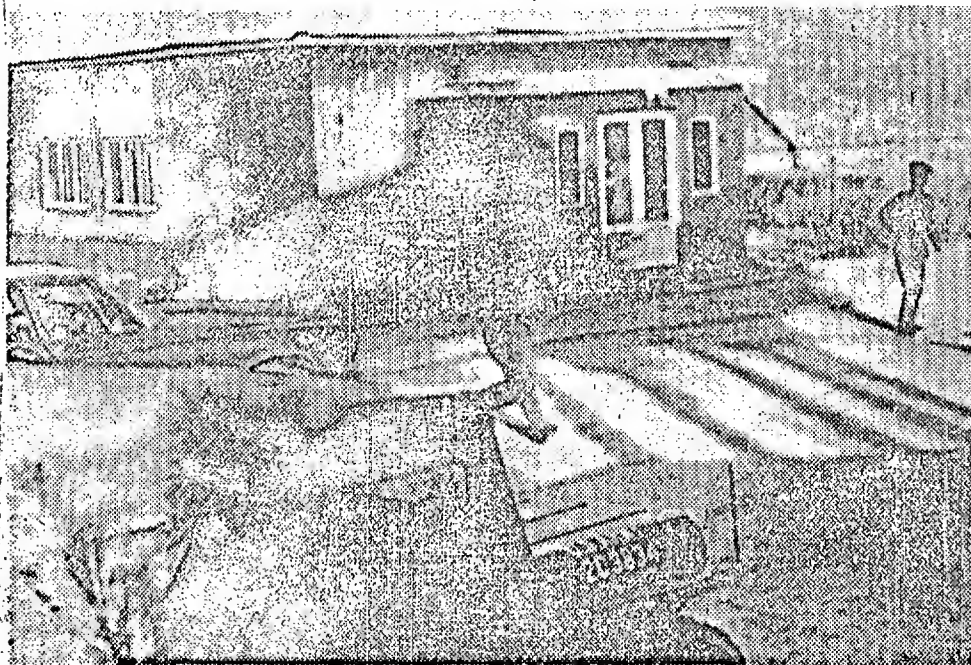
Lee Soo-keum, vice president of the North Korean central news agency, caused an uproar in the Communist hierarchy last month when he jumped into an Allied automobile at the peace village of Panmunjom and defected to the West. The Reds claimed he was abducted. These photos, released today, show how he did it. Hiding in the shadows of a nearby building, the newsman jumps into the car as an Army colonel struggles to slam the door in the face of Red guards.



An MP moves in and throws a block into the Communist guards.



A British MP (right) and a Red guard pull pistols in the excitement.



—United Press International

A Red guard, gun drawn, chases the departing car.